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Swiss Settlement in Randolph County, West Virginia:

A Study of Land Deals, Policies, and Immigration

Elizabeth Satterfield

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Jacob Anderegg walked through the dark forest of Randolph County, West Virginia, soaked through to the skin in September 1871. He hiked alongside his brother and “two woodhicks,” leaving Grafton several days prior for his uncle’s home in Helvetia, a nearly seventy-mile trek. Having rained all day, Jacob doubted the skills of the accompanying woodhicks who promised to make a fire but decided to rest for the evening in the damp, dark forest without any food. Jacob as a willful twenty-year old Swiss man instead hiked to the top of the hill only to see the light of Alexander, a nearby village. The wearisome group was welcomed into the home of a kind woman, who fed them deer meat for supper and buckwheat cakes for breakfast the next morning.

Upon reaching their uncle in Helvetia, they realized that the postal system was quite slow: their uncle did not expect them despite numerous mailed letters. Although it was September, it had snowed so Jacob, his brother, and his uncle went hunting but got lost since “Helvetia was nothing but a laurel path and a few little log house and shanties scattered around.” Jacob and his brother did not stay in Helvetia, however; they returned to New York City with deer antlers in hand, having to explain the nature of the West Virginia hills to the many that wondered how “there was so much woods in West Virginia.”

After travelling home to Switzerland, Jacob’s absence from Helvetia was not long for he intended to return the following spring after receiving his uncle’s report that “Helvetia improved so it would be before many years bigger than Buckhannon.” His mother, however, would not allow him to travel alone and insisted he get married before leaving. He wanted a wife “that can work” and not one who “would hang full of gold.” His brother recommended a girl named Liseta, whom he visited every Sunday, often telling her how difficult their lives would be in Helvetia, but she promised to be “right with [him].” They soon left for America.

On their voyage to America, their ship had mechanical trouble and “began to wiggle like it was going to upset.” The ship was evacuated and all passengers went into lifeboats, Jacob and Liseta on the last one. A rescue ship shortly arrived but collided with the abandoned ship, stranding them in the Atlantic, with Liseta saying, “Jacob, you can swim and I have to drown.” He “saw there was no hope” but suddenly one of the ships was repaired. “The tears for joy rolled down my cheeks. They felt as big as my fist.” Although rescued, they “nearly starved or froze” on board the boat and lost everything during the perilous journey.

After staying in New York for a week, they set out for Helvetia. But having lost supplies, they ate only “cornbread and cornmush” yet managed to “clear about one acre and planted some potatoes and little corn.” Although there were many squirrels in the area, Liseta refused to let Jacob go hunting because she feared for his safety. But “one Saturday she said I could go a little so in half hour I come home with six squirrels. She liked them so well she let me go often.” After this, the Andereggs had much better luck, having “plenty meat and good potatoes and deer meat.” Even Liseta hunted and fished, killing “a nice pheasant” and helping Jacob catch trout. They soon bought a cow to have fresh milk and had several “fat hogs to kill.” Every year, they cleared “two to four acres” to raise crops. In the spring, they made maple sugar and syrup but were frugal with their sweets, even making coffee from “rye or corn.”¹

Jacob Anderegg’s account, though quite dramatic and even humorous at times, illuminates the hardships of immigrating to the United States and the difficult trials of a life in the mountains of West Virginia. Anderegg’s experience is not unique, as many other Swiss left their mother country in the latter half of nineteenth century to start new lives in the wilderness of Randolph

¹ “Some Recollections from the life of Jacob Anderegg,” box 3, folder 22, David H. Sutton, Compiler Research Papers Regarding Helvetia, WV, A&M 3687, West Virginia & Regional History Center (WVRHC), West Virginia University (WVU) Libraries, Morgantown, West Virginia.

County, meeting adversity with determination and perseverance, disappointment with ingenuity and patience. These hard-working Swiss men and women carved out lives for themselves and their families in the backcountry of West Virginia, not only building homes and planting crops, but establishing social entities while celebrating their Swiss heritage. To this day, many of their Swiss traditions live on in the hills and hollows of Randolph County.

Beginning in 1869, Swiss immigrants, first men followed by their families, settled in Randolph County, establishing first the village of Helvetia followed by the smaller settlements of Alpena, Czar, Adolph, Alexander, Florence, Turkeybone, and Buckwheat, today known as Pleasant Hill. Encouraged to immigrate by both private landowners and land agents as well as the West Virginia state government, Swiss immigration to Randolph County peaked in the 1870s when state support was at its greatest but trickled out in the 1880s because of land ownership problems which adversely affected the flow of immigrants, publicity, and state policy significantly. Despite enduring hardships, Swiss settlers created thriving communities founded on their common Swiss heritage. This study on the Swiss of Randolph County serves as case study for land selling and buying trends in post-Civil War West Virginia.

Historiography on Swiss Settlement in West Virginia

The historiography on Swiss settlement in Randolph County first begins at the regional level. Over the last seventy years, multiple histories have been published on Randolph County, many of them anecdotal, pictorial, and localist. Examples include *Randolph 200: A Bicentennial History of Randolph County, West Virginia*, *Magazine of History and Biography* published by the Randolph County Historical Society, *A History of Randolph County: from its earliest exploration and settlement to present time*, and *The Story of the Helvetia Community* published through WVU Extension Service. *Randolph 200* provides a pictorial overview of Helvetia and Alpena only with

limited and very general narratives, which include many broad topics from agriculture to religion, all of which have no supporting citations.² *A History of Randolph County*, similar to *Randolph 200*, has a narrow focus and only includes information on Helvetia, Alpena, and Adolph, the latter two having only a paragraph each.³ *The Magazine of History and Biography* likewise only published articles on Helvetia and Alpena, though these appear more professional with known authors and better organization.⁴ The most exclusive of all regional histories, *The Story of the Helvetia Community*, was part of a series of town histories published by West Virginia University Agricultural Extension Service in the 1920's and 1930's, focusing on the agricultural component of Helvetia. Since it is only a short pamphlet, the amount of detail is limited though it was reproduced twice, the last edition marking Helvetia's centennial in 1969. Though moderately comprehensive of the town's history, the pamphlet was written by Helvetia residents thus author biases must be considered.⁵ Although these regional histories encompass a helpful overview of Randolph County, they only briefly mention Swiss settlers and completely overlook smaller Swiss communities within the county, focusing instead on the larger, more notable settlements of Helvetia and Alpena, drawing little to no conclusions about these settlements, providing only overviews and anecdotes.

More formal, professional works on Swiss settlement in Randolph County likewise exist. David Sutton's monograph *Helvetia: The History of a Swiss Village in the Mountains of West*

² Donald L. Rice, *Randolph 200: A Bicentennial History of Randolph County, West Virginia: A Pictorial and Documentary sampler*, (Elkins, WV: The Society, 1987) 56-62.

³ Albert Squire Bosworth, *A History of Randolph County: from its earliest exploration and settlement to present time*, (Parsons, WV: McClain Print Co, 1975) 246, 266-270.

⁴ Clara M Preysz, "The Swiss Settlement at Alpena, W.Va.," *Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 9, (Elkins, WV: Randolph County Historical Society, 1937) 33-37; Werner Wegman, "The Helvetia Community: National Group in the Rural Population," *Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 10, (Elkins, WV: Randolph County Historical Society, 1942) 17-36; "Helvetia Community," *Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 13 (Elkins, WV: Randolph County Historical Society, June 1969) 76-83.

⁵ Eugene Daetwyler, Annie Teuscher, and E. Metzner, *The Story of Helvetia Community*, (Morgantown, WV: Agricultural Extension Division, 1923).

Virginia provides an excellent cultural history with many poignant photographs; however, it focuses solely on Helvetia, excluding nearby Swiss settlements from the narrative. As a descendant of an original Helvetia settler, Sutton's specific focus on Helvetia stems from this personal bias, which he frankly acknowledges within his preface.⁶ Another Helvetia study, a thesis written by Atje Partadiredja, focuses on the sociological component of the village in the 1960s. It is purely sociological and economical with a predisposition concerning the culture of poverty, spending a considerable amount of time on community development and subsistence farming and their relation to issues in Indonesia, the author's home country; however, statistical and demographic information is included in the study, which provides a wealth of information to the reader.⁷ Troy Bell Wilmoth, in a 1937 thesis on Swiss settlement in Randolph County, is slightly more inclusive than either Partadiredja or Sutton's works since he incorporates the history of Adolph, Alpena, and Turkeybone communities in addition to Helvetia; however, it lacks discussion of land deals, focuses heavily on community institutions, and neglects smaller Swiss communities like Florence, Alexander, and Czar.⁸

In academic journals, only two articles make mention of Swiss settlement. Elizabeth Cometti in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* highlights the role of the West Virginia state government, legal system, and influential landowners on settlement of Helvetia and Alpena. Cometti focuses on the efforts of J.H. Diss Debar to encourage immigration as well as the often-unscrupulous nature of land dealings in Randolph County; however, the cultural and social aspects

⁶ David Sutton, *Helvetia: The History of a Swiss Village in the Mountains of West Virginia*, (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2010). Sutton conducted nearly twenty oral interviews with direct descendants of original Swiss settlers to Helvetia. Using these as well as other primary sources such as letters and family documents, Sutton crafted a wonderful narrative about the cultural and heritage component of Swiss in Helvetia, covering education, religion, agriculture, music and dance, and family. Because of his thoroughness regarding culture, this study will focus instead on the nature of land deals, politics, and state trends in relation to the Swiss in Randolph County.

⁷ Atje Partadiredja, "Helvetia, West Virginia: A Study of Pioneer Development and Community Survival in the Appalachia," (Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1966).

⁸ Troy Bell Wilmoth, "Swiss Communities in Randolph County," (Master's thesis, Davis and Elkins College, 1937).

of immigration are neglected.⁹ Likewise, Roberta S. Turney in *West Virginia History* provides analysis on the efforts of Joseph H. Diss Debar to increase immigration to the state. Turney differs from Cometti in that she does not focus specifically on the Swiss, which provides helpful context for encouragement of European immigration to the state.¹⁰

In terms of background information, Leo Schelbert's dissertation on Swiss Mennonites, though not in West Virginia, provides a national context for Swiss immigration. With a broad focus, Schelbert discusses conditions in Switzerland, different eras of Swiss migration to the United States, and the role of religion in their immigration.¹¹ In addition to this work, *Transnational West Virginia: Ethnic Communities and Economic Change, 1840-1940* by Ken Fones-Wolf and Ronald L. Lewis provides a state context for immigration. Although its focus is not solely Swiss, this work delineates motives for migration, how immigration was handled in the state of West Virginia, and the experiences of immigrants.¹²

Because all these works each focus on a different component of Swiss settlement in Randolph County, there is no comprehensive work on both the political and legal side of settlement as well as its cultural and social history. While Turney and Cometti investigate the state's approach to immigration as well as the nature of land deals in the state, Sutton and regional pieces emphasize specific communities, often providing little context, either in the state or nationally. This work strives to fill this gap in the historiography, placing the histories and experiences of Swiss

⁹ Elizabeth Cometti, "Swiss Immigration to West Virginia, 1864-1884: A Case Study," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47, no. 1 (1960): 66-87.

¹⁰ Roberta S. Turney, "Encouragement of Immigration in WV, 1863-71," *West Virginia History* 12, no.1 (1950): 46-60.

¹¹ Leo Schelbert, "Swiss Migration to the Americas: The Swiss Mennonites," (doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1966).

¹² Ken Fones-Wolf and Ronald L. Lewis, *Transnational West Virginia: Ethnic Communities and Economic Change, 1840-1940*, (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2011).

immigrants and settlements within the greater context of West Virginia and its government initiatives while analyzing land trends and their relation to immigration.

Coming to America

Following the American Civil War, immigration to the United States increased. In Europe, many countries faced economic downturns and political tensions; Switzerland was not immune to this trend. Switzerland went through several political upheavals in the 1850s through 1870s, with the rise of trade unions, political parties, multiple governing documents, and several nearby wars. Tensions between Prussia and Switzerland ran high in the 1850s followed by the Franco-Prussian War in 1870; although Switzerland was not part of this conflict, its proximity affected the Swiss economy, politics, and daily life. Politically, a new constitution was established in 1872, strengthening the central federal government, which caused factionalism and disagreement. As an agricultural country, most Swiss were farmers; however, it became difficult to own and operate a farm due to expensive land, lack of common pasture, and the expansion of railroads which brought in cheap imports.

A solution for many was emigrating to the North America where land was available and affordable.¹³ One Helvetia resident remembered how her mother thought that it was “impossible to ever own a farm in Switzerland” and “America...was a land of opportunity where they could make more money than they made out in her country.”¹⁴ Leo Schelbert defines four phases of Swiss migration to the United States: in the colonial period to Pennsylvania and the Carolinas, from 1816 to 1860 to the Mississippi Valley, from 1865 to 1890 to the Midwest, and 1890 to 1914

¹³ Discover Switzerland, “Switzerland in the 19th Century,” *Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft*, <https://www.eda.admin.ch/aboutswitzerland/en/home/geschichte/epochen/der-bundesstaat-im-19--jahrhundert.html> (accessed December 5, 2017).

¹⁴ #270 (C270, R87B3) Helen Schneider Sutton, Helvetia, West Virginia, oral interview, conducted by David Sutton, December 29, 1979, Oral History Collection, WVRHC.

to the west coast.¹⁵ Between 1850 and 1880 alone nearly 130,000 Swiss migrated to the Americas.¹⁶ When Swiss immigrants first arrived in the United States, many stayed in New York City, trying to find work, while others traveled directly to their destination. Although Midwest states of Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Illinois were most popular for settlement in the post-Civil War United States due to the farmable, flat land, West Virginia offered the benefit of cheap land. For example, Ohio land prices ranged from \$25-\$50 per acre due to its proximity to manufacturing centers as well as the Ohio River, whereas in Randolph County, West Virginia, prices ranged from \$1-3 per acre, which was extremely affordable and attractive to a new, often impoverished, immigrant.¹⁷

Encouragement of Immigration

Emerging as a new state from the Civil War, West Virginia's statehood government made immigration a priority. On March 2, 1864, the West Virginia legislature passed a bill to promote immigration, and Joseph Herbert Diss Debar was hired as immigration commissioner.¹⁸ J.H. Diss Debar, better known for creating the West Virginia state seal, was a French immigrant and was first hired as a land agent in West Virginia. He was great proponent for West Virginia statehood and promotion of the state's resources and its practicality for immigrants.¹⁹ As commissioner, he encouraged immigration from "Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, and Great Britain" in cooperation with both private and public institutions, although the state government provided little to no funding.²⁰ Diss Debar strived to bring the unemployed from cities such as Boston as well as

¹⁵ Schelbert, 96-7.

¹⁶ Schelbert, 57.

¹⁷ "Bericht Des Schwizer general Konsuls uber das Jahr, 1877," translated by Heiko ter Haseborg, Box 3, Folder 53, David H. Sutton (DHS) Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC, WVU Libraries.

¹⁸ J.H. Diss Debar, *Sixth Annual Report of Commission of Immigration, 1869*, Imm 1.1: 1868-69, 1871, WVSA, Culture Center.

¹⁹ *The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, 1st ed., s.v. "Joseph H. Diss Debar," by Bernard L. Allen.

²⁰ Cometti, 70, 72.

western European countries to establish colonies in West Virginia, notably Helvetia which was still “in embryo” in 1869.²¹ Diss Debar believed that government played an important role in immigration, stating in his 1871 report that the “future home of the immigrant in this country is determined before he leaves his old home...by influences adduced to him at home by representation of various State agencies for the promotion of immigration.”²²

Due to the quality of land and its extremity to transportation and communication means, Debar suggested selling land for \$2 or \$3 per acre, a modest and fair sum.²³ He produced the *West Virginia Monitor and Real Estate Adviser* monthly, which included information on industry, agriculture, and demographics as well as a brief history of the state, all to entice an individual or family to relocate to West Virginia.²⁴ Diss Debar had materials printed in newspapers in West Virginia’s larger cities such as Parkersburg and Wheeling, in both English and German.²⁵ His most noteworthy accomplishment is the publication of *The West Virginia Hand-book and Immigrant’s Guide: A Sketch of the State of West Virginia*, which he claimed to have printed and distributed 18,000 copies. Not only did the pamphlet include similar information on agriculture, land, internal improvements, natural resources, governing documents, manufacturing, schools, religion, roads, and West Virginia’s history like the *Monitor*, it had comparisons on population, agricultural

²¹ J.H. Diss Debar to Gov. H.H. Matthews, September 12, 1879, Governor Henry Mason Matthews Papers, AR 1726, #84, WVSA, Culture Center; J.H. Diss Debar, *Sixth Annual Report of Commission of Immigration, 1869*, Imm 1.1: 1868-69, 1871, WVSA, Culture Center.

²² J.H. Diss Debar, *Eighth Annual Report of Commission of Immigration, 1872*, Imm 1.2.1871, WVSA, Culture Center; J.H. Diss Debar, *Sixth Annual Report of Commission of Immigration, 1869*, Imm 1.1: 1868-69, 1871, WVSA, Culture Center.

²³ J.H. Diss Debar, *Sixth Annual Report of Commission of Immigration, 1869*, Imm 1.1: 1868-69, 1871, WVSA, Culture Center.

²⁴ “Prospectus of the West Virginia Monitor and Real Estate Advertiser,” Joseph Hubert Diss Debar (1820-1905) Papers, A&M 1577, WVRHC, WVU Libraries.

²⁵ J.H. Diss Debar to John Hoffman, April 2, 1873, Debar, Joseph Hubert Diss (1820-1905) Correspondence, A&M 4181, WVRHC, WVU Libraries.

output, and more for each county in the state as well as unique topics such as vineyards and water power.²⁶

At a time, Diss Debar thought his efforts bested those of western states as he boasted in a letter to landowner and judge Jonathan Bennett in July 1873.²⁷ Despite Diss Debar's opinion, Midwest states far-exceeded the efforts of West Virginia. In both Wisconsin and Minnesota, official encouragement of immigration began in the 1830s and the 1850s respectively. In Minnesota, the population increased from 4,535 in 1849 to 172,023 in 1860 due to the massive influx of immigrants from western European countries of Germany, Norway, Scotland, Switzerland, and others.²⁸ The immigration budgets of these states also exceeded that of West Virginia, some rumored to be as much as \$10,000. Even states as close as Tennessee had a more organized system of immigration, proactively working with railroads while offering enormous tracts of land for free.²⁹

Diss Debar worked closely with land barons such as Jonathan Bennett and Gideon Camden. He worked to sell land for these barons, first by encouraging immigration to the area in which they owned land. For example, Diss Debar asked Bennett for money to print pamphlets to entice immigration into areas such as Randolph and Kanawha Counties, where Bennett owned large tracts of land. Diss Debar believed that his "experience in West Virginia colonization, under adverse circumstances, shows conclusively how little is really required to give industrious resolute settlers a start and what the chances of their success are when located in sections where their labor will

²⁶ J.H. Diss Debar, *West Virginia Hand-Book and Immigrant's Guide: A Sketch of the State of West Virginia* (Parkersburg: Gibbens Bros, 1870), https://books.google.com/books?id=P0REAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA196&lpg=PA196&dq=j.w.+curtis+ww&source=bl&ots=t3g676SNrD&sig=esdKk5O6_yYws99gk7oR3Ccrgfc&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiMhbztuPvWAhWC7SYKHdluDjEQ6AEIMTAC#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed December 9, 2017).

²⁷ J.H. Diss Debar to Jonathan Bennett, July 21, 1873, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

²⁸ Livia Appel and Theodore C. Blegen, "Official Encouragement of Immigration to Minnesota during the Territorial Period," (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society, 1923) 167-68, 171-72.

²⁹ Turney, 57.

not be expended in vain.”³⁰ Diss Debar’s relative success as the commissioner of immigration helped him form business relationships with wealthy land owners and use his advertisement skills to continue promoting immigration.

In many West Virginia counties, wealthy businessmen and lawyers owned extremely large tracts of land. In Randolph County, Judge Gideon D. Camden, Col. John Hoffman, Jonathan Bennett, and David Goff were major landowners and had considerable political and social influence both at the local and state levels. Besides their career commonalities, all four men had supported the Confederacy during the Civil War. Gideon Camden grew up in rural western Virginia and became a practicing lawyer, judge, and politician in Clarksburg. He represented the Whig Party and several western Virginia counties at the 1850 Virginia Convention. Although he did not support secession in 1861, he favored the Confederacy. Due to this association, he could not hold political office again until the passage of the Flick Amendment, which allowed ex-Confederates to reenter the political scene, and West Virginia’s 1872 Constitutional Convention. In 1890, Camden was described as a “man of large common sense, of sterling character” who “enjoys the possession of a large estate which he earned by his own toil.”³¹ Jonathan Bennett likewise was a man of influence in central West Virginia, practicing law in Weston. He supported Virginia and the Confederacy during the Civil War, most likely due to his marriage to the cousin of Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, and like Camden, did not again hold political office until the rise of the Democratic party in 1872. According to his biographer, Bennett held the same respect Camden did, as “a business man of strict integrity, a zealous public-spirited citizen.”³² Hoffman and Goff likewise were Confederate sympathizers during the War. Of all four landowners, Goff

³⁰ Diss Debar to Bennett, April 27, 1879, Box 2, Folder 5, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

³¹ George W. Atkinson and Alvaro F. Gibbens, “Gideon Draper Camden,” *Prominent Men of West Virginia*, (Wheeling: W.L. Callen, 1890) 945-48.

³² Atkinson and Gibbens, “Jonathan McCally,” *Prominent Men of West Virginia*, 272-73.

was the only one who resided in Randolph County. He was a lawyer in Beverly who served as Superintendent of Schools of Randolph County prior to the War. During the War, he fostered Confederate support in Randolph County but fled with his family, only to return to find his home ransacked by federal troops.³³ John Hoffman, a lawyer from Clarksburg, served as a colonel for the Confederacy and incurred serious injuries during his service. Like both Bennett and Camden, Hoffman reentered West Virginia's political scene as a judge after the 1872 Constitutional Convention.³⁴ Because these landowners could not exercise their political influence from 1863 to 1872 in West Virginia, they became involved in the encouragement of immigration, specifically to their vast land holdings in Randolph County.

The Role of a Land Agent

Because of the busyness and variety of their endeavors, these landowners often employed land agents to find buyers for their land. For Swiss settlement in Randolph County, Charles E. Lutz was the primary land agent. Charles, or Karl as he was known in Switzerland, Lutz was a Swiss engineer who rose to prominence in Bern, the capital of Switzerland, as an architect. After being accused of embezzling, he was found guilty and had to pay back the money he stole as well as many other debts. He fled to the United States and after several legal disputes in New York and Pennsylvania, came to West Virginia. Although the settlement of Helvetia was well under way, Lutz informed the settlers that their land deeds were useless and incorrect and must be repurchased from the actual landholders, notably Bennett and Camden. After resurveying the land with

³³ Historic Beverly Preservation, Inc., "The David Goff House," *Historic Beverly Preservation*. http://www.historicbeverly.org/builds/david_goff_house.htm (accessed December 4, 2017).

³⁴ Antietam on the Web, "Colonel John S. Hoffman," *Antietam on the Web*. http://antietam.aotw.org/officers.php?officer_id=681 (accessed December 4, 2017); *The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, 1st ed., s.v. "The Flick Amendment," by I.D. "Duke" Talbott.

surveyor James Pickens, Lutz corresponded directly with Randolph county landowners and worked as their land agent to resell the land at affordable rates.³⁵

Lutz wanted to encourage more immigrants to come to Helvetia and employed advertisements in major US cities and abroad. In an 1873 advertisement to encourage settlement in Helvetia, Lutz promises to highlight both “good and bad points” about the area but instead focuses squarely on the positives of Randolph County, downplaying its cold winters, stating that “early and late frosts of the north are lacking here” and calling its steep geography “very hilly.” He boasts of an anticipated sawmill and gristmill, an established post office, the presence of many tradesmen and craftsmen, cheaply priced food, and plentiful wildlife. He notes only a single negative: seclusion with lack of communication or transportation. Although he mentions this as the only negative, it is perhaps the most important part of a successful settlement and is a significant reason for the incredibly low land prices of \$2-3 per acre. Another contributing factor in the low land prices is the poor quality of the land. Hardly any was flat and had to be clear-cut to farm the land, which was quite rocky. As a land agent, Lutz stressed the integrity of land deals, stating that “all titles under which I sell land are perfect” and the “settlers are cheerful, because they were not cheated.”³⁶

However, when it came to selling land, the titles were far less than perfect. Lutz was given authorization in written form to sell land for these major landowners; however, there were no signed contracts, which caused considerable trouble, as did the lack of means of communication between rural Randolph County and the larger towns where the landowners lived. This inhibited the progress of many land deals, especially obtaining a deed. For example, Lutz wrote to David

³⁵ Sutton, 17-18.

³⁶ C.E. Lutz, “Helvetia, Randolph County, West Virginia,” March 1873, Box 2, Folder 1, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

Goff, asking him to ask Col. Hoffman for the deed for a land purchase.³⁷ Lutz constantly asks in his letters for the landowner to forward deeds for purchased land.³⁸ He also allowed buyers to pay in installments which slowed the process farther. For example, a Mr. Fahrner purchased land but did not have enough money to immediately pay for it; Lutz permitted this if Fahrner made payments.³⁹ This financial strategy also backfired at times. Senhauser, the storekeeper in Helvetia, owed \$500 but was dragging his feet though Lutz knew he had the money.⁴⁰ Lutz filled out deeds for sold land but held on to them until getting approval from the landholder, often for “persons who paid long ago.”⁴¹ One settler, Gotlieb Betler, wrote Bennett directly in March 1875, concerned about the integrity of Lutz’s deed. The deed was over a half of year late, and Lutz expected Betler to pay interest on the remaining balance although Betler had promised to do so when he received the deed. Betler declared that “[paying the interest] is an unjustifiable retard of Mr. Lutz and [Lutz] has to pay for it himself.”⁴² Even after Lutz was no longer a land agent, he wrote to Camden in 1879 to request deeds from long-ago transactions.⁴³

Lutz’s cousin happened to be the President of Switzerland: Karl Schenk. Schenk knew Lutz “personally very well and trust[ed] [him] in every regard” and apparently wrote to him concerning Swiss settlement in Randolph County, noting that reports had been too “vague,” and he wanted more information. Because of this, Lutz wanted to establish emigration offices in Switzerland and New York to help with travel details, believing that Schenk had “the power the goodwill, and for all great friendship to me to direct the whole emigration at once toward West Va.” He believed that he could redirect “whole tide of emigration from Switzerland in here, as it

³⁷ C.E. Lutz to David Goff, February 29, 1876, Box 2, Folder 3, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

³⁸ Lutz to Bennett, May 8, 1872, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

³⁹ Lutz to Goff, February 29, 1876 and July 24, 1877, Box 2, Folder 3, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁴⁰ Lutz to Bennett, July 18, 1873, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁴¹ Lutz to Bennett, March 9, 1875, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁴² John Betler to Bennett, March 25, 1875, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁴³ Lutz to Gideon Camden, May 30, 1879, Box 2, Folder 6, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

was years ago with Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, etc.” if only for a “small sacrifice.” Lutz needed financial support from the landowners.⁴⁴

A common theme found in Lutz correspondence with landowners is his lack of money. He constantly promised to travel to Europe to encourage immigration or to Weston, Beverly, or Clarksburg to conduct business yet asked for money repeatedly, often using his older age and young wife and child as pleas for help.⁴⁵ Another excuse was the condition of roads. Much of West Virginia experienced a lack of passable roads and nearby railroads, which the state would not fund unless there were residents in the area yet immigrants would not come to the area without good roads. In February 1875, Lutz writes to Bennett, wishing for a “more perfect road law!” and in March had planned to travel to Weston to visit Bennett “but on the count of such a horrible road I can’t.”⁴⁶ Despite his pleas for monetary help and many excuses, Lutz thought of himself as an important figure in settlement of Randolph County, stating in March 1876 that “it was only for me, by my activity, energy, and knowledge is such business, that people came here and settled the country.”⁴⁷

Beginning as early as November 1870, there is evidence to suggest that settlers were unhappy with Lutz and his business practices.⁴⁸ In early 1871, a man named Caspare Apser was causing “great disturbance” by telling people in New York negative things about Helvetia. According to Lutz, Asper was a “scoundrel” and “rascal” who shot another man’s steer and had a wife with a certain promiscuous reputation. But when Asper apologized to Lutz, he quickly

⁴⁴ Lutz to Bennett, July 1, 1871, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC; Lutz to Camden, June 19, 1871, Box 2, Folder 6, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁴⁵ Lutz to Bennett, June 15, 1877 and August 17, 1877, Box 2, Folder 2, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC; Lutz to Bennett, February 23, 1871, September 13, 1872, and April 30, 1873, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁴⁶ Lutz to Bennett, February 14, 1875 and March 9, 1875, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁴⁷ Lutz to Bennett, March 6, 1876, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁴⁸ Lutz to Bennett, November 15, 1870, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

forgave him.⁴⁹ Issues with landowners arose in 1873 when Bennett accused Lutz of taking his money. Lutz, quick to defend himself, believed he did nothing wrong and was authorized to sell land for \$2 per acre with a portion to cover his expenses which include printing pamphlets and notices, travelling to Pennsylvania and Ohio, being hospitable, and “coax[ing] people to come.” Although Lutz frequently accepted money for the sales he brokered, he asserted that he instructed buyers to send money directly to the seller.⁵⁰ In June 1875, a group of settlers met together to discuss Lutz and his land deals, and “concluded that [Lutz] sold land of [Bennett] under false pretense, that all the deeds, whatever were given were worthless and that they had to loose their lands.” The group, comprised of about twenty men and known to Lutz as “roguish conspirators,” decided to send a delegate of seven to the landholders to deal with the problem directly.⁵¹ Lutz, knowing of their plans, wrote to Bennett and said that he was fearful and “not safe of [his] life” and “26 men (partly deceived boys) against one man is always hard fighting.”⁵² Evidently, Lutz was supported by both Bennett and Camden in the next few months, but he and Pickens were targeted by settlers, even having difficulty collecting payments for land sold.⁵³ By December 1875, Lutz had his mail redirected to Buckhannon.⁵⁴

At some point in 1876-1877, Lutz and Pickens had a dramatic falling out. After years of mentioning Pickens as an ally and a great help, Lutz warned Jonathan Bennett and David Goff of Pickens’s poor character, noting that he engaged in secret deals with a Dr. Stucky and was

⁴⁹ Lutz to Bennett, January 1, 1871, February 23, 1871, March 7, 1871, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁵⁰ Lutz to Bennett, June 28, 1873, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁵¹ Lutz to Camden, August 17, 1887, Box 2, Folder 6, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁵² Lutz to Bennett, March 6, 1876 and June 18, 1875, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC; Lutz to Camden, July 20, 1875, Box 2, Folder 6, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁵³ Lutz to Bennett, November 12, 1875 and n.d., Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁵⁴ Lutz to Bennett, December 27, 1875, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

deceptive and smooth-talking.⁵⁵ Through May 1877, Lutz mentioned Pickens in his correspondence with Bennett, explaining that Pickens stole land out from under him then sold it to someone else, slandering Lutz all along the way. Lutz noted that Pickens “received \$8000 in his pocket without any responsibility, and he does nothing to bring in immigrants.”⁵⁶ Additionally, Pickens, according to Lutz, presented himself as the “main man” in land deals although he worked for Lutz.⁵⁷ Dr. Stucky was equally disliked by Lutz, since he and other members of the Helvetia community organized a club to “slander” him and a public report was underway to investigate the whole matter, though Lutz was certain it would affirm his innocence.⁵⁸ Lutz had sold Stucky land from Bennett’s holdings in April 1873. When he had not paid a year later, Lutz repossessed the land and sold it to another party, writing to Bennett to ignore any written communication from Stucky.⁵⁹ In 1875, the feud raged on, as Lutz called Stucky a “drunkhard and in some respect a very dangerous character.”⁶⁰ President Schenk, once one of Lutz’s greatest proponents, opposed him and stood with Stucky as well as the Swiss consulate.⁶¹ From this point on, Stucky and Lutz were at odds, which contributed to Stucky’s alliance with Pickens.

After this intense falling out, Lutz decided to give up his land agent position because of “jealous and bad people” and considered opening a boarding house but abandoned that idea by April 1878.⁶² His role as land agent was further damaged when Judge Hoffman told the Swiss Consul Hitz that he had no land agent although Lutz was convinced that Hoffman had “fully authorized” him to sell his land. He further believed that the Swiss Consul “could find nothing and

⁵⁵ Lutz to Bennett, David Goff and Mr. Arnold, n.d., Box 2, Folder 2, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC. Although there is no date, in context of other letters, it is late 1876 or early 1877.

⁵⁶ Lutz to Bennett, April 19, 1877, Box 2, Folder 2, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁵⁷ Lutz to Camden, January 25, 1878, Box 2, Folder 5, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁵⁸ Lutz to Bennett, August 17, 1877, Box 2, Folder 2, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁵⁹ Lutz to Bennett, January 10, 1874 and April 18, 1874, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁶⁰ Lutz to Camden, July 9, 1875, Box 2, Folder 6, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁶¹ Lutz to Camden, August 17, 1877, Box 2, Folder 6, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁶² Lutz to Bennett, October 17, 1877, Box 2, Folder 2, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

declared me openly innocent.”⁶³ Despite his optimistic outlook, the legitimate result of the Swiss Consul’s report made it so Lutz “could sell no lands any more, emigration stopped entirely and consequently [his] earning failed at once.”⁶⁴ From 1872-1875, Lutz had sold 18,141 acres; between the tumultuous events of 1875 and 1877, he sold only 500 acres.⁶⁵ Lutz felt slandered and victimized and at one time mentioned a lawsuit, hoping to be represented by Bennett and Camden, which never materialized.⁶⁶

Lutz’s time in West Virginia was not over when his land agent career ended. By 1879, Lutz was appointed as a state immigration agent with a budget \$200.⁶⁷ Lutz felt that he was an asset for the cause of immigration in West Virginia, and during the legislative session of 1879 petitioned the state legislature for a position. Lutz, optimistically writing to Camden, stated that “I shall be enable to lead a large part of the Swiss Emigration to this state. My petition is far from humbug.”⁶⁸ By August 31, 1879, Lutz was writing on stationary with the state immigration letterhead. Lutz apparently fulfilled his position well, watching for potential immigrant opportunities, specifically from Switzerland. When hearing that the Swiss government was looking for 100,000 acres for immigration to the United States, Lutz wrote to Governor Henry Matthews, urging him to support West Virginia over the potential choice of Tennessee.⁶⁹ Expectedly, Lutz was still disliked by

⁶³ Lutz to Bennett, March 6, 1876, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁶⁴ Lutz to unknown recipient, February 9, 1878, Box 2, Folder 2, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁶⁵ Lutz to Camden, December 9, 1877, Box 2, Folder 6, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC. (1872: 3585 acres; 1873: 4173 acres; 1874: 5665; 1875: 4178)

⁶⁶ Lutz to Camden, December 9, 1877, Box 2, Folder 6, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁶⁷ C.J. Cresopto to R. Stalnaker, July 7, 1879, Governor Henry Mason Matthews Papers, AR 1726, #68, WVSA, Culture Center.

⁶⁸ Lutz to Camden, February 13, 1879, Box 2, Folder 6, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁶⁹ Lutz to H.H. Matthews, May 28, 1879, Papers of Governor Henry Mason Matthews, AR 1726, #217, WVSA, Culture Center.

some. One man wrote to Governor Matthews' administration that Lutz was disrespectful and a bad representative for immigration to West Virginia as many in Randolph County would agree.⁷⁰

Settling Randolph County

Helvetia was the first and largest of the Randolph County Swiss settlements. Several Swiss immigrants purchased land from Samuel Peugh and S.S. Smoot while in New York. After travelling by train to Clarksburg then walking over sixty miles to Helvetia, the settlers had begun clearing land constructing homes and barns. One woman remembered how it took four days to walk through the deep snow and how she "always wanted to go back to New York."⁷¹ After working for nearly a year, the arrival of Lutz in September 1870 changed everything. After announcing to the settlers that their deeds were worthless, he reported to Bennett that three or four settlers were on his property but had deeds from Peugh and Smoot. Although Peugh and Smoot thought they owned the land, their claim was based on a 1790 survey which was negated by the 1850 claims of Bennett and Hoffman on the same land, illustrating the chaotic and unregulated land system in western Virginia.⁷² Since the settlers already paid for the land once, Lutz suggested that each be given 100 acres for free if they stay for five years. For the additional land sold, Lutz proposed a price of \$1.50 per acre and reminded Bennett that it was his "duty to be sure of a good title."⁷³

This price was intended only for poor land; better land was sold for three dollars per acre, two dollars to the landowner and one to Lutz. However, Lutz often made blunders with the deeds and sales. For example, he sold better quality land to Mr. Zihlmann for one dollar per acre although

⁷⁰ John Hitt to Mr. Luding May 15, 1880, Papers of Governor Henry Mason Matthews, AR 1726, #151, WVSA, Culture Center.

⁷¹ Anne Lorentz, "Swiss Village Thrives in West Virginia Hills: Party Walks Sixty Miles in Forests, Many Become Discouraged in Early and Returned to New York," *Clarksburg Telegram*, Sept. 30, 1930, p.3.

⁷² Sutton, 12-18.

⁷³ Lutz to Bennett, September 14, 1870 and February 23, 1871, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

it should have been two.⁷⁴ Although Lutz distinguished a difference between poor and good land, it seems there was quite a lot of poor land. The US Geological Survey states that Randolph County is primarily composed of sandstone and shale, both of which prove difficult to cultivate.⁷⁵ For example, the son-in-law of Mr. Dietrich, one of the land buyers, complained about the rocky soil his father-in-law purchased for him.⁷⁶ Another sale of land to “different mekaniks” was “very rough and steep...and nobody wanted it till now,” signifying that poorer land was sold to later settlers with little interest in farming.⁷⁷ J.H. Diss Debar sums up the land situation in West Virginia nicely, writing in 1877 that there is a “great deal of trashy W.Va. land in the market and some even totally bogus.”⁷⁸

In fairness, the land buying and selling situation in West Virginia at this time was chaotic, unmanaged, and unlegislated, thus Lutz was not the only unscrupulous figure in the real estate business. For example, Lutz writes to Jonathan Bennett that a Mr. McCartney sold land to a Mr. Urik Nachtigall for twenty dollars per acre, a hefty and unfair sum. When Nachtigall, an “unjust and troublesome man” by Lutz’s account, refused to pay McCartney, he simply went directly to Bennett and purchased the same land for two dollars per acre.⁷⁹ Although it is impossible to know who rightfully owned the land and had the legal right to sell it, Lutz’s took Nachtigall to court because he purchased the land directly from Bennett instead of through him as a land agent. Nachtigall reported the case to the Swiss consulate in Washington, D.C., who wrote to Bennett that “these personal quarrels” are a “mutual harm and retard the prosperity of the settlement” and

⁷⁴ Lutz to Bennett, June 7, 1871, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁷⁵ United States Geological Survey, “Geologic Unites in Randolph County, West Virginia,” United States Department of the Interior, https://mrdata.usgs.gov/geology/state/fips_unit.php?code=f54083 (accessed December 5, 2017).

⁷⁶ Lutz to Bennett, May 8, 1871, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁷⁷ Lutz to Bennett, December 27, 1875, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁷⁸ Diss Debar to Bennett, March 18, 1877, Box 2, Folder 5, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁷⁹ Lutz to Bennett, March 6, 1876 and April 24, 1876, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

implored him to “protect the actual titles of the sail.”⁸⁰ Despite their advice, the situation worsened when Lutz decided that he wanted the land for his family although Nachtigall had already made improvements to it.⁸¹ The specific legal outcome of this situation is unknown, but Lutz did not receive the land as he wanted and was shortly thereafter forced out of the area. The disputed land was a total of two acres.⁸²

There always seemed to be difficulties when it came to Lutz. Something always went wrong such as a mistake in an account book or buyers backing out, yet Lutz seemingly would always correct the situation.⁸³ There was always something great on the horizon but always an excuse on his tongue. In June 1873, he wrote to Bennett that he expects “a lot of families directly from Switzerland” by fall.⁸⁴ However, this endeavor was not mentioned again until December 1875 when Lutz again promised that the money Bennett invested “will be seen in 1876 by emigrants settling in W.Va.”⁸⁵ By 1878, however, Lutz was no longer a part of the Swiss community in Randolph County and his plans for further immigration and growth were never fully realized. To use his own words, Lutz once stated that “not everything is gold what shines in here, I have to stand often unpleasant things and have to fight not only for me but also for my landholders: If I don’t care for their interest and they don’t stick to me then our landselling business will soon have an end.”⁸⁶

When immigrants first arrived in the area that would become Helvetia, the first step was clearing land to build homes and barns and to plant staple crops. To clear the land, the virgin forest was cleared, many of the logs burned because they were unusable, too large, and unable to be

⁸⁰ Swiss Consul to Bennett, May 23, 1876, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁸¹ Lutz to Bennett, May 30, 1876, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁸² Lutz to Bennett, March 6, 1876, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁸³ Lutz to Bennett, May 3, 1873 and May 3, 1873, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁸⁴ Lutz to Bennett, June 14, 1873, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁸⁵ Lutz to Bennett, December 27, 1875, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁸⁶ Lutz to Bennett, July 18, 1873, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

transported.⁸⁷ They wisely established a settlement house, where new arrivals could stay until their own home and plot of land was ready. A daughter of original settlers recalled how her parents had heard about Helvetia in a newspaper advertisement in Cleveland which promised that “every man would get a job...they would give them a lot, free of charge!” But “they were awfully disappointed when they ran out of money and out of food and out of everything.” They stayed in the settlement house and described the conditions as “uncomfortable and everybody tried to do the best they could.”⁸⁸ As reported by the Swiss Consulate in Washington, D.C., originally thirteen Swiss settled Helvetia in 1869, followed by six in 1870, twelve in 1871, fifty-three in 1872, eighty-four in 1873, one hundred thirty-three in 1874, and forty-six in 1875.⁸⁹ After the ordeal with Lutz, only three came in 1876 and after 1877, settlements in Ohio and Tennessee were of greater importance in the Swiss Consulate’s report.⁹⁰ Years after the steady flow of immigrants subsided, the settlement house became a hotel for travelling salesman, visiting relatives, and the transient working population brought on by the timber and mining industries. As a hotel, the Huber family could take twelve boarders at a time and provided daily meals.⁹¹ A second hotel, operated by the Koerner family, also took in boarders in the late nineteenth century.

Following the initial settlement of Helvetia, several other Swiss communities, some more prosperous and successful than others, sprang up in the surrounding area: Alpena, Adolph, Czar, Florence, Alexander, Turkeybone, and Buckwheat. The communities of Adolph and Buckwheat, later known as Pleasant Hill, were established far away from Helvetia because the settlers were

⁸⁷ #276 (C276, R87B3) Anna McNeal, Helvetia, West Virginia, oral interview, conducted by David Sutton, January 5, 1979, Oral History Collection, WVRHC.

⁸⁸ Anna McNeal, oral interview, January 22, 1979, WVRHC.

⁸⁹ “Bericht Des Schwizer general Konsuls uber clas Jahr, 1875,” translated by Heiko ter Haseborg, Box 3, Folder 53, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁹⁰ “Bericht Des Schwizer general Konsuls uber clas Jahr, 1876” and “Bericht Des Schwizer general Konsuls uber clas Jahr, 1877,” translated by Heiko ter Haseborg, Box 3, Folder 53, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

⁹¹ #277 (C277, R87B3) Mary Huber Marti, Buckhannon, West Virginia, oral interview, conducted by David Sutton, July 13, 1979, Oral History Collection, WVRHC.

shown good, flat land by Pickens but were sold something entirely different and were “cheated in here.” Those in Turkeybone, according to oral tradition, chose to live in that area but farming was difficult. Despite the differing locations of Swiss settlements, those in Helvetia visited and got along with those in Turkeybone, Adolph, and Buckwheat.⁹²

The End of Swiss Immigration

Of course, the encouragement of immigration was not favored by all, especially in the nativism culture of the nineteenth century. In a letter to Gideon Camden, a Mr. William Tallon objects to “the hiring of Debar to invite emigration from France” because “there was a time when we were a weak nation. It was all right to get all the emigrants we could but the things is changed. We are a strong nation... there will not be a foot of land left for your grandchildren or mine.”⁹³ In contrast, Swiss settlers viewed native-born Appalachians as “lazy people,” a common and long-endured stereotype of the region and its people. One remarked that “they planted a patch of corn, then all their other work is fishen hunten and maken children by the dozens,” and “they are 200 years behind time.”⁹⁴ Although no mention of conflict between Swiss settlers and their neighbors, whether verbal or physical, was found while conducting this research, it is worth noting that tension likely existed between established West Virginians and their Swiss neighbors.

As West Virginia state government administrations fluctuated, immigration became a lesser priority for lawmakers. In 1870 and 1872, Democrats filled many state offices and changed policies, notably influencing the 1872 Constitutional Convention. With the passage of the Flick Amendment, many ex-Confederates and southern sympathizers, including the major landowners of Randolph County, reentered West Virginia’s political scene. While improvements to the

⁹² Anna McNeal, oral interview, January 24, 1979, WVRHC.

⁹³ William Tallon to Camden, November 7, 1873, Folder 1, Gideon D. Camden (1805-1891) Papers, A&M 1188, WVRHC.

⁹⁴ Lutz to Camden, May 13, 1871, Box 2, Folder 6, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

immigration system were mentioned throughout the 1870s and 1880s, nothing came of it much like the promise of funds during the Republican administrations.⁹⁵ Diss Debar, in a letter to Governor Jacobs in March 1871, noted that he needed a budget of \$5000 to properly advertise immigration to the state but only received \$1500; despite this, he managed to distribute 3,000 pamphlets in Germany and felt he was doing a good job. But when he proposed some of his ideas to the legislature, they “never elicited a line of reply.”⁹⁶ His job in jeopardy as the state government transitioned into a new administration, Diss Debar reminded the governor in April 1871 that the “handbook...has done more to attract attention to the State than any other means yet tried” although western states had larger budgets for immigration advertisement.⁹⁷ West Virginia’s tight budget is also noted in the Reports of the State Immigration Agent, when Lutz mentioned the lack of funds for immigration, having only \$500 in 1879, no money in 1880, but a need for \$2000 in 1882.⁹⁸ It was not until the turn of the century that renewed interest in immigration at the state level resurfaced with the appointment of a new commissioner of immigration.⁹⁹

In addition to budgetary and political concerns, less Swiss chose to immigrate to West Virginia because bad publicity associated with immigrating to Randolph County. As early as 1871, Swiss in Ohio, who were considering relocating to West Virginia, were concerned about the legitimacy of land titles as was an investor in Pennsylvania. Though Lutz blamed the bad reputation on the original Peugh and Smoot land deals, it is obvious that his own actions impacted Swiss settlement to Randolph County.¹⁰⁰ After information regarding sour land deals and the difficulties of immigration reached the Swiss consulate in Washington D.C., Consul Hitz wrote a

⁹⁵ Cometti, 86; Turney, 59-60.

⁹⁶ Diss Debar to John Hoffman, April 2, 1873, Debar, Joseph Hubert Diss Correspondence, A&M 4181, WVRHC.

⁹⁷ Diss Debar to Governor Jacob, August 16, 1871 and March 1871, Joseph Hubert Diss Debar Papers, A&M 1577, WVRHC, WVU Libraries.

⁹⁸ C.E. Lutz, *Reports of the State Immigration Agent, 1882*, Imm. 1.2: 1882, WVSA, Culture Center.

⁹⁹ *The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, 1st ed., s.v. “Immigration Commissioner,” by Kenneth R. Bailey.

¹⁰⁰ Lutz to Camden, May 13, 1871, Box 2, Folder 6, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

scathing article, published in German newspapers in the United States, which Lutz translated in a letter to Bennett in 1876. In the article, Hitz asserted that land prices were too high considering the lack of communication and distance from the railroad and thought it is “impossible to exploit timbers.” He said the land was not surveyed “by a competent and response surveyor” and “so called land agents...have not lawful powers of attorney for to sell lands,” thus the “middleperson” of land agent should be eliminated. Lutz, infuriated by this article, believed it to be fabricated and a power-play by Hitz who wanted an “ambassadorship from Switzerland and needs therefore the influence of old Schenk in Bern.”¹⁰¹

Despite Lutz’s objection to the article, it had massive influence. For example, its effect in Ohio is seen in a letter from a land-buyer in Cleveland. Lutz quoted this letter to Bennett, in which the author described how “nobody is sure if their contracts...are valid or not” and that it “made such an impression on people in here that nobody will go there any more and not in the state of W.Va.” The letter states that “the mistrust is powerful” and ends with a melancholy statement: “I wish not to have seen Helvetia.”¹⁰²

In addition to poor press, Swiss were discouraged to immigrate to West Virginia by the Swiss government. Because of the underhanded land claims and sales in Randolph County, the Swiss government became wary of settlement in West Virginia. Particularly the settlement of Alpena impacted their decision making as agents in both Switzerland and West Virginia encouraged Swiss to immigrate with false announcements about the location and quality of land then abandoned the settlers in the wilderness of Randolph County. The Swiss government, when informed of the issue by Swiss living in Helvetia, actively investigated this case, which deterred

¹⁰¹ Lutz to Bennett, June 9, 1876, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

¹⁰² Lutz to Bennett, June 9, 1876, Box 2, Folder 4, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

future settlement in West Virginia.¹⁰³ In 1882, Lutz, now as a state immigration agent, recognized this trend, stating that “emigration affairs in Europe have undergone great changes; first emigration reached unheard of dimensions, and second most of the governments in Europe gave their attention to emigration by putting emigrant agencies under more or less severe laws, for the protection of emigrants during their voyage against swindles and robberies.”¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

Although Swiss settlement to Randolph County lasted not even twenty years, it serves as an excellent example of group migration to West Virginia, the state government’s role in immigration, and the influence of land claims and deals on system of immigration. While both private and public parties pushed for the encouragement of immigration, factors such as land ownership, lack of infrastructure, and poor publicity made Swiss settlement a challenge to facilitate and maintain. The unruly and unregulated nature of land ownership in post-Civil War West Virginia is apparent in this study since many settlers purchased the same land more than once then received suspicious, delayed, or incorrect deeds from less than respectable characters. Despite the difficulties the Swiss encountered, they created a thriving a community which still exists today, with lasting cultural traditions of dance, music, food, farming, and family. The original settlers are remembered fondly by their descendants, one who aptly remarked that the “[old folks] lived better and they lived longer and they lived happy.”¹⁰⁵ Though romanticized, this statement reflects on the simple, family-oriented life the Swiss built and enjoyed in the reminiscent hills of Randolph County, West Virginia.

¹⁰³ Unknown Helvetia resident to Swiss Consulate in Bern, June 25, 1879, Box 3, Folder 54, DHS Papers, A&M 3687, WVRHC.

¹⁰⁴ C.E. Lutz, *Reports of the State Immigration Agent, 1882*, Imm 1.2: 1882, WVSA, Culture Center.

¹⁰⁵ Anna McNeal, oral interview, February 25, 1979, WVRHC.

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